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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001717

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER
DS/OP/AF

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SUBJECT: MIXED REPORTS IN RUN-UP TO ZIMBABWE'S LOCAL
ELECTIONS

REF: (A) HARARE 1711 (B) HARARE 636 (C) 2002 HARARE
2354

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Zimbabwe will hold two parliamentary by-elections, and mayoral and urban council elections in twenty cities across the country on August 30 - 31. Embassy Harare has been coordinating with other missions in Harare to mount an observation effort to cover most of the constituencies. There have been incidents of violence, vote-buying, and other machinations; but there have also been positive signs - police have arrested individuals alleged to have been involved in intimidation, the GOZ has authorized substantially more local election observers, and candidates have met to reduce tensions. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (U) Zimbabwe will hold two parliamentary by-elections, seven mayoral, and eighteen urban council elections in twenty cities across the country on August 30 - 31. By-elections are scheduled for Makonde (Mashonaland West) and Harare Central districts. In Makonde, ZANU-PF Minister of Higher Education Dr. Swithun Mombeshora, who also had been MP for Makonde since 1980, died from a stroke in March. MDC Harare Central MP Michael Auret resigned due to prolonged illness. The mayoral and urban council elections are being held according to Zimbabwe's convoluted schedule for such events; more are to be held in November. With terms of five years, this is the first time that the opposition MDC, formed in 1999, has contested these seats. ZANU-PF still needs five parliamentary seats to obtain a majority - these by-elections are unlikely to change that number.

Observers

[1](#)3. (C) Embassy Harare has been coordinating with other missions in Harare to mount an observation effort to cover most of the constituencies around the country. The GOZ has accredited 308 observers from the Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN)-- enough to cover most of planned 350 - 400 polling stations. This stands in stark contrast to previous elections in which a tiny fraction of ZESN's proposed observers were accredited. At the same time, the government has not responded to repeated requests from numerous diplomatic missions (including this one) for accreditation of observers.

Machinations

[1](#)4. (C) Based on their initial audit, MDC director of elections Remus Makuwaza said that 4,000 people have been added to the voters' roll in Mutare, 3,000 in Gwanda, 7,000 in Makonde, and 6,000 in Gweru since the last elections in those cities. 1,700 have been inexplicably dropped from voters' rolls in Harare Central alone. MDC Shadow Minister of Justice and Bulawayo MP David Coltart reported that the Registrar General's Office in Bulawayo delayed release of voters' rolls to MDC officials until the week before the election despite repeated requests; one of five rolls remains outstanding. The MDC Mayor of Bulawayo reported that his staff observed youths engaging in activities suspected to be associated with ballot-stuffing. According to an independent councilor in Mutare, where council and mayoral elections will be held, youth militia members recently distributed Grain Marketing Board (GMB) sourced maize meal to ZANU-PF party cardholders only, a practice MDC officials maintain is widespread. In the same vein, the independent press reported that youth militia members in Bulawayo also sold GMB maize for Z\$1,000 (US\$1.18) per 10 kg bag, while the normal price had been around Z\$14,000 (US\$2.50).

[1](#)5. (C) According to Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN) Director Reginald Matchaba-Hove, the Registrar General had not formally announced polling stations locations as of August 27. He also anticipated there would be "mobile polling stations" in Makonde, and that the Registrar General might reduce the overall number of polling stations

throughout the country from 441 to 350.

Violence

16. (U) Ruling party supporters used intimidation tactics to prevent at least twenty potential candidates from registering their candidacies at nominations held on July 21 (Ref B). Human rights lawyers in Mutare reported that during the week of August 11, ruling party members beat about fifty MDC supporters, including council and mayoral candidates. The MDC also reported on August 27 that six of its polling agents in Kwekwe were abducted and beaten by ruling party supporters, and candidates in Kadoma and Kwekwe had been intimidated by late-night visits by suspected members of the Central Intelligence Office (CIO). In Makonde police arrested members of a gang known as "Top Six" for attacking MDC election agent Joseph Mutsvangwa on August 25. In Gwanda police arrested ruling party supporters who reportedly had intimidated MDC members and candidates during the week of August 18. According to MDC officials, unknown assailants on August 27 petrol-bombed the home of MDC council candidate Nathan Makwasha in Kariba.

Progress

17. (C) The Mutare troika of bishops called a meeting of all three mayoral candidates and secured their public agreement to abide by a "code of conduct" agreement and to call on their supporters to conduct their campaigns peacefully (Ref A). They established an office to mediate pre-election complaints associated with the code of conduct. According to Thomas Bvuma, Public Relations Coordinator for the GOZ's Electoral Supervisory Committee (ESC), as required by law ESC officials had formed multi-party liaison committees in Makonde and Harare Central to foster dialogue aimed at reducing pre-election violence. ESC's Bulawayo coordinator reported such a liaison committee was working well in his district and already had resolved a number of complaints amicably.

Comment

18. (C) While there have been troublesome levels of reported violence, intimidation, and other machinations in the run-up to these elections, the incidents appear to be fewer in number and less egregious than in previous local elections (Refs). On a national level, these elections will do little to change the political imbalance of power in the short run. Nevertheless, the integrity of their conduct and outcome may have an impact on atmospherics for possible inter-party dialogue and on the parties' efforts to play to international opinion.
SULLIVAN